

Rohingya Refugee crisis: Impact on Bangladesh

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Abstract

Rohingya Refugees are considered one of the most prosecuted people in the world. They have been forced to flee to Bangladesh a couple of times by the Myanmar government. The latest simmering tension between Rakhine Buddhists and Rohingya Muslims in Western Myanmar escalated into a violent conflict in 2012, first in June and again in October. The violence led to the loss of over a hundred lives, destruction of thousands of homes, and the displacement of tens of thousands of people. Rohingyas are the most persecuted communities in the world. Since August 25, Myanmar has sharply escalated its systematic assault against a Muslim minority people called the Rohingya in a ravaging campaign of murder and rape which the top United Nations human rights official considers a "textbook example of ethnic cleansing. Over 200 villages have been burned and destroyed. Acts of brutality, namely killings, disappearances, torture, and sexual violence is done by Myanmar army. Myanmar discriminated Rohingya on the basis of name, different look and religion. Lakhs of Rohingya Muslims have been displaced who are taking shelter in Bangladesh. This paper will analyze the Rohingya crisis and its impact on Bangladesh in detail. It also provides some recommendations to the world community and other concerned authorities in order to resolve the crisis. Descriptive and analytical research methods have been applied primarily. Data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources.

Key words: Simmering tension, Rakhine, Rohingya, Escalated, Ethnic Cleansing, and Bangladesh.

Historical Background of Rohingya crisis

The Rohingyas are among the world's most vulnerable populations that are oppressed and neglected. Approximately 1 million Rohingyas have been forced to flee from Myanmar to Bangladesh due to mistreatment, torture, mass killings by Myanmar's government. Tracing the origin of the Rohingyas, we come to know that, "Rohingya" is a name in the history which refers to the Arakanese Muslim. Initially, the Rakhine state was referred to as Rohang, from which the name "Rohingya" was derived (Manan, 2017). However, it has become a political term now. The origin of the Rohingya in Arakan, Myanmar is well documented in the literature and are said to date from 7th century A.D. Their ancestry can be traced to arab, pathan, central asia and indo-Mongoloid people who settled in the region over several centuries (Walton & Hayward, 2014). Despite this long history of Rohingya settlement in arakan, Myanmar, their existence today is a divisive issue and they are widely abused by Buddhists of Myanmar. The rakhine Buddhists regard Rohingya Muslim Community as illegal migrants who came to Burma (Myanmar) from neighboring countries particularly from Bangladesh. Furthermore the G.O.M (Government of Myanmar) even prohibits the use of term Rohingya not only within government circles but has also attempted to discourage the media as well as other countries from using the word to describe the refugees who have fled from persecution of Rohingya that remains in Myanmar. The first massacre of the Rohingya occurred in Feb 1978 when the Tatmadav (Burmese Military) launched a large-scale operation named Nagamin (Dragon King) for the purpose to take a census of the country. This devastating operation resulted in brutal incidents, rapes, mass-killings and expulsions of the Rohingya from their own land. Estimates put the death toll at nearly tens of thousands of Rohingya, with more than two hundred thousand being forced to flee Bangladesh (Parnini, S. 2013). But Burmese army very easily justified this violence by blaming conflict on "armed bands of Bengalis" and terrorist Muslims ransacking Buddhist communities. In 1991 second Mass exodus happened and it was estimated that around 260,000 fled to Bangladesh. The Rohingya left their own land due to systematic Tatmadav (Military) labor demands along the North- west frontier and wide-spread aggression against them (Rohingya). On second massacre Burmese Government claimed to be introducing reforms and opening the

economy and these claims served to heighten international attention to the situation in Rakhine state. With U.N's pressure Burma signed an M.O.U with Bangladesh in 1992 which obliged Burma to accept the return of Rohingya refugees who could prove their previous residence in the country. However, proof of residence has long been routinely denied to the Rohingya in Burma (Staples, 2012).

Present scenario of Rohingya Refugees crisis and influx to Bangladesh

The 1951 Refugee convention defines a refugee as: A person who: owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country or to return there because there is a fear of persecution.

The reasons for mistreatment must be one of the five reasons mentioned in Article 1 A (2) of the refugee convention, which include: race, religion, nationality, membership of a specific social group or political opinion (The Refugee Convention 1951).

The Rohingya refugee crisis in latest years is becoming much devastating, alarming across globe. In the period between 2008 and 2012 the persecution of the Rohingya was continuous, and some reports had noted that this had a particularly religious aspect. Because, this epoch saw the destruction of numerous mosques which it was claimed, had been built without proper permission, and saw the creation of 'Muslim Free Areas' in some parts of the state. Furthermore Rohingya prepared to change their religion received the same rights as other citizens. The continuity of earlier policies of discrimination, including restrictions on travel and family size, marriage reflects the Rakhine Nationalities Development Parties (RNDP's) determinations to force the Rohingyas out of Myanmar. The events of 2012 can only be described as an attempt at ethnic cleansing seeking to drive the Rohingyas out of their own century's old land. Regrettably, the plight of Rohingya from Military coup in 1962 to 1999 set dangerous precedents for their treatment in the 2000s to the present day. In present day Myanmar, the Rakhine ethnic group's leaders blame the state's perceived problems on the Rohingya minority population as 'Foreigners' to the state (Abid Bahar , 2010). In 2012 violence was sparked by the rape and murder of Rakhine (Buddhists) women by three Muslim men and in retaliation Rakhine men stopped a bus and beat and killed ten Muslims who were on board. The 2012 ethnic riots represent an escalation of the long-standing ethnic cleansing policies to those of Genocide. More than 240 Rohingya, including children, were killed in the massacres that year. Again due to military threats thousands of Muslims fled to Bangladesh for safe shelter and this mass displacement occurred on same day the ARSA attacked Government forces in 2017. In retaliation, Government forces supported by Buddhist militia launched a "clearance operation" that involves persecution, rapes and killings (Ratcliffe, 2017). More than 1,000,000 Rohingya people have come to Bangladesh to avoid ethnic and religious persecution by military forces in Myanmar. Earlier, Bangladesh was already hosting more than 300,000 Rohingyas. The new mass departure began on August 25, 2017 following the outbreak of violence in Myanmar's Rakhine. Hitherto, in the recent influx of 2017, more than 670,000 (as of 25th Feb 2018) Rohingya migrants crossed the border and took shelter in Bangladesh. (IOM, I.O.f.M., 2018).

Impact of Rohingya crisis on Bangladesh

The Fundamental purpose of this paper is to evaluate the impact of Rohingya refugee influx on the host community. There can be two types of impacts on local community these are positive and negative impact. When Refugees are skill-full, highly educated they can give benefit to host community and can aware local community about various skills in this way many developments in various sectors can become possible and in the long run local community can become vibrant, stable and prosperous. While as when Refugees are not skilful, when they are illiterate, poor, weak they can-not give any benefit to host community in any way and can in the long run destabilize, destroy the whole local community. A significant study of May Sadt and Verwimp demonstrated that large refugee influxes have many and varied social, Economic, political, Environment, Security impacts on

existing social and economic structures of local community (Maystadt & Verwimp 2009). Now how this crisis impact on host community on its various aspects these are separately explained below;

1. Social impact of Rohingya crisis on Bangladesh

The Refugee influx may destabilize traditional balances in settlement areas based on ethnicity, religion, community values and beliefs, and provisions of social services, all of which may cause clashes (Betts, A 2009). Social impact includes health issues, education, law and order situations and considers how the local population perceives these Rohingyas. Several NGO workers have noted that the Rohingyas have little awareness of family planning, and the population of Rohingya is likely to increase in the camps which will result in additional pressure on jobs, food and health. Sanitation is one of the major problems Rohingyas face. The shortage of latrines is creating the problem of open defecation which will spread diseases among both communities (Livelihoods working groups, 2018). Their presence can be a threat to Bangladesh's inter-communal harmony and create challenges for vital social values, such as culture, religion, and language structure, of local people (OCHA, 2018). Humanitarian aid observers predict that Rohingya women in the camps will give birth to an estimated 48,000 babies in 2018, and which will increase in future it will also create further pressure on local population. Besides this Rohingya influx has been generating a number of other social difficulties, such as their involvement in arms and drug trafficking, human trafficking, criminal activities and prostitution in Cox's Bazar region. Datta, found that many Rohingyas are living outside the refugee camps and are mixing with local people by claiming to be citizens of Bangladesh, which has allowed them to buy land in Cox's Bazar district, to become voters in elections, and to use illegal means to obtain Bangladeshi passports to travel abroad (Datta, SK 2015). These are really alarming developments for the concerned authorities. Furthermore intermarriage and integration between local and Rohingyas is being prevented by law and these steps by government may result in further animosity, mistrust and violence between two group which will badly impact on Bangladesh and on Rohingya as well.

2. Political impact of Rohingya crisis on Bangladesh

Since starting of Rohingya crisis, Bangladesh was somewhat unwilling partner in accepting refugees at their border and allowing refugee camps to be set up. But through international pressure and promises of support in the form of humanitarian aid, the Government of Bangladesh has shown outstanding sympathy and tolerance for refugees. BIPSS Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies claims that the refugees crisis has caused Bangladesh to lose the political and economic support of two of its closest allies, India and china, because both have sided with Myanmar and have enormous and strategic interest there (BIPSS, 2017). As a result, a new diplomatic alignment is taking place in this region that can have negative impact on Bangladesh. Generally, there was public support for the government's decision to allow asylum for Rohingya as refugees and this decision may have an impact on next National election (in early 2019) depending on how the refugees crisis evolve what Idris and Das claimed that Bangladesh is concerned about the political impact of Rohingya crisis; for example, as one of the ministers of the government Obaidul Quader, has raised concerns that the extremist group Islamic state may try to conduct militancy in the region and radicalize Rohingyas (Idris, I 2017).

3. Economic impact of Rohingya crisis on Bangladesh

A significant study by Kobia and Cranfield claimed that refugees can be threat because if they are unemployed they are a burden, yet if they are employed they create pressure on the local job sector (Kobia & Cranfield, 2009). And also the effect of these mixed factors depends on social sustainability and economic development. Baldwin and Marshall pointed out that most refugee camps are in remote areas where majority of inhabitants are poor and depend on daily wages earned through unskilled labor (Baldwin & Marshall, 2018). However, the authors found that Rohingya refugees are now competing for the available jobs and will undercut local workers. For Daily work, local Bangladeshi labor demands 500 takas (\$6), while Rohingya laborers are available at 300 takas, resulting in the employer engaging the cheaper Rohingya laborer. This is causing a grave deterioration of livelihood opportunity for the already poor local community who subsist day to day on their meager earnings. Cookson argues that Bangladesh is a small country that has a delicate economy with limited

resources, over population and limited agricultural land (Cookson, 2017). Alam claims that the overall cost to the government for refugee settlement areas, is a burden for national economy (Alam, 2018). And Tourism sector which contributes good money to a country also get impacted in Bangladesh through refugees. Cookson shows that Cox's Bazar is one of the key tourist destination points in Bangladesh, but the huge refugee influx has led an adverse impact on tourism income as well (Cookson, 2017). Bangladesh is facing financial burden as it has to meet the basic human necessities of the Rohingya refugees. Although World Bank and US are providing monetary aid to Bangladesh to for Rohingya refugees but still lot needs to be done. Bangladesh is already an overpopulated country and has given shelter to lakhs of Rohingya refugees, so the international community should also carry the financial burden and provide aid to Bangladesh.

4. Environmental impact of Rohingya crisis on Bangladesh

Bangladesh was already facing the challenges of environmental degradation due to refugee influx for decades, but the recent refugee influx has been far more influential. The main key environmental impacts arising from Rohingya presence are in relation to natural disasters, lack of supplying of drinking water and proper waste management, deforestation, soil erosion. Refugees cut trees for fuel and to construct their shelters, leaving barren earth where there were once trees and fruit plantations. Teknaf wild life sanctuary is a reserve forest which is also at risk due to overexploitation of Rohingya refugees. Ahmed argues that additional refugee influx to existing local population generates excessive demand for natural resources with long-term challenges for a sustainable environment (Ahmed, 2018). The loss of forest area is 3500 acres from the total forest area of 2,092,016 acres due to Rohingya concentration in Cox's Bazaar. It represents a loss of 1.67% in the forest area of Cox's Bazaar and a loss of 0.05% in the total national forest area (Abrar, 2018) In the Rohingya camps Tarpaulin, aluminum and bamboo, are widely used as major shelter materials. They are non-disposable except bamboo. Plastic containers are used to supply water to the Rohingya camps which are harmful to environment (Zhou et al., 2010). The terrain of the hills has lost their natural setting due to the indiscriminate hill cutting to provide shelters for the Rohingya refugees. The hills have lost their vegetation which makes them vulnerable for landslides and erosion. In addition, the WHO warns that appropriate construction of latrines near to tube wells have polluted the ground water and threatened the health of people with disease, such as dysentery and cholera (Ahmed, 2018)

5. Security impact of Rohingya crisis on Bangladesh

The refugee presence generally creates security challenges for the social life of the local population due to an increase in incidences of robbery, assassination, prostitution and drug trafficking (Gomez & Christensen, 2010). Because of resentment and desire for revenge against villains may pose a great risk of radicalization by fundamental Organizations. Rohingyas may decide to join militant groups, such as Rohingya solidarity organization (RSO). Al-Qaeda, Jamaat-ul-Mujahidda Bangladesh (JMB) which may represent a threat for National and Regional security (Wolf, 2014). Furthermore, Alam claims that the radical Islamist group Al-Qaeda recently made an online appeal asking Bangladeshi Muslims to support Rohingya by conducting extremist activities against Myanmar (Alam, 2018). The Arakan Rohingya salvation Army (ARSA) militant group, whose attacks on Burmese security posts last year triggered the army's indiscriminate "clearance operations;" has pledged to continue insurgent campaign against what it calls "Burmese state sponsored terrorism." The Bangladeshi security establishment is concerned both that ARSA will try to recruit within camps, and that it will use the camps as a base for cross-border fighting. Extremist networks in Bangladesh and Myanmar, whether led by hard line Islamist preachers or radical monks, are gaining influence which has become a source of concern for Bangladesh (Alam, 2018).

Conclusion

This paper sought to identify the social, economic, and environmental aspects of the Rohingya refugee impact on Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the government, political leaders and citizens have shown some sympathy towards the Rohingya for decades, following international law and allowing refugees to enter and stay on its land

temporarily. There are many implications arising from the findings, which need to be acted upon by international community, government agencies, NGOs, and international aid donors to bring about change and improvement for local people who have had to bear the bad impact of this crisis. Inclusions of Responsibility to protect and the Genocide convention must be vitalized for future of preventative measures of possible genocide. First of all it is responsibility of Myanmar government to stop genocide and ethnic cleansing of Rohingyas. The international community led by U.N, E.U, ASEAN and U.S must learn from past experiences of Rwanda and former Yugoslavia and should not allow genocide and ethnic cleansing against the Rohingya Muslims. International community should warn Myanmar military against the persecution of Rohingya ethnic minority. ASEAN is the most appropriate regional organization in addressing crimes against humanity in Myanmar. Most important dialogue partners, like U.S and the E.U, must collaborate with above regional organization to implement unified diplomatic pressure so that change will occur in Myanmar regarding protection of Rohingyas. Furthermore, a combination of various measures regarding solution of Rohingya issue are adoption of strong legal framework, smarter sanctions, and cooperative diplomacy which can be the right policy mix for a better way forward. The plight of refugees worldwide today is a grim reminder of the inability of international human rights Organizations, democratic nations, and humanitarian aid agencies to prevent the persecution, violence, and abuse of people which is forcing them to flee their homes.

Further research is needed to involve local people as well in identifying solutions to their problems and ensuring them that they are also a part of the processes of resolving issues for their benefit. The underlying interreligious and interethnic causes of the conflict must be resolved, and the citizenship and national identity of the Rohingya must be recognized and safeguarded as part of the repatriation and resettlement process. The solution of this issue being agreed to by Myanmar is doubtful, at least in the short term, but that diplomatic and political pressure by other governments, regional organizations, and the UN could produce better results and eventually pave the way for a resolution. The challenge is for concerned members to convince Myanmar to play an active role to stop the forced migration, ensure the security, safety and rights of the Rohingyas and, finally, to recognize Rohingyas as citizens of Myanmar. If it will not happen then the Rohingya crisis will remain a major burden not only for host community and government but for others as well. The challenge in the short term is to ensure that the situation does not deteriorate further.

The Rohingya crisis and its impact on Bangladesh has become one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world. As such, it is vital that much deeper, context-specific research on economic, social, political, security and environmental impacts should be carried to help host countries, who give shelter to refugees, manage prolonged crisis in most humane and sustainable way. It will also reveal more about these refugee events and to learn ways of preventing them or resolving the multitude of problems that eventuate, particularly for host countries. As Bangladesh is facing financial burden due to Rohingya refugees, it is the responsibility of the world community to share this burden by providing necessary aid to Bangladesh so that they can take care of the needs of Rohingya refugees. The need of the hour is to ensure that refugees do not become scapegoats in host countries like Bangladesh, where frustration among ruling elites and the local population may result in the forced return or further dislocation of the already dispossessed Rohingya but at the same do not become a source of security, political, economic, social and environmental crisis for Bangladesh. It is the responsibility of international organizations, regional organizations and INGO's to address the genuine concerns of Bangladesh as well as to play their part in resolving the Rohingya crisis to ensure both safe return and resettlement of Rohingya refugees to Myanmar.

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